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ABSTRACT

By means of 12 selected subscales of the Personality Inventory for Children (PIC), which were used to plot profiles, this study investigated personality characteristics of oppositional children. In general, oppositional children are children who do not do what is asked of them. In particular, oppositional behavior consists of at least 6 months of disobedient, negativistic, and provocative opposition to authority figures which is manifested in at least two of the following five symptoms: (1) violations of minor rules; (2) temper tantrums; (3) argumentativeness; (4) provocative behavior; and (5) stubbornness. Participants, who completed a 600-item PIC, were the parents of 43 oppositional children and 57 compliant children. Their children were between 6 and 12 years of age. Findings suggest that oppositional children may be psychologically maladjusted, have problems in school achievement, be depressed, and tend to come from ineffective families which lack cohesion. Such children may display delinquent tendencies and be somewhat withdrawn. Oppositional children appear to be anxious and to display some features that are similar to those exhibited by children with psychosis. Oppositional children are often overactive, but not when they are severely depressed. These children may also lack social skills and may not have effective social relations. (RH)

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A Personality Profile of Oppositonal Children as Measured on Selected Scales of the Personality Inventory for Children

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Running Head: OPPOSITIONAL CHILDREN

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Abstract

A Personality Profile of Oppositional Children

As Measured on Selected Scales of

the Personality Inventory for Children

The present study sought to investigate the personality characteristics of oppositional children, using selected subscales of the Personality Inventory for Children (PIC) to plot a personality profile of oppositional children. Twelve of the 16 subscales were selected for inclusion in the study. Findings: 1) No significant interaction existed between the sex and oppositional type of the child. 2) Oppositional children were found to differ significantly from non-oppositional children on the 12 subscales selected for inclusion in the study. 3) Oppositional children scored significantly higher than non-oppositional children on 11 of the 12 subscales and significantly lower on one of them. Conclusions: 1) A personality profile of oppositional children does exist on selected scales of the PIC. 2) Oppositional children's personality characteristics can be described using these scales.

A Personality Profile of Oppositional Children as Measured on Selected Scales of the Personality Inventory for Children

Oppositional children are children who do not do what is asked of them. The behavior change goal with these children would be to get the child to stop doing nothing, rather than to get the child to stop doing something, as is the case with most discipline efforts. The behavior that is not being done is often most anything that is asked of them.

As opposed to attempting to better understand the oppositional child's personality per se, attention is often focused on altering such a child's environment in order to provide the necessary reinforcement for change. Gilpin and Maitz (1980) described the characteristics of the oppositional child's parents and identified problems of low academic achievement, symptoms of depression, and dysfunctional family systems.

Oppositional behavior, as described in the Quick Reference to The Diagnostic Criteria From DSM III (American Psychiatric Association, 1980), consists of "a pattern for at least six months, of disobedient, negativistic, and provocative opposition to authority figures, as manifested by at least two of the following symptoms: 1) violations of minor rules, 2) temper tantrums, 3) argumentativeness, 4) provocative behavior, and 5) stubbornness" (p. 41).

Three primary aspects of this oppositional disorder have been researched: 1) its genesis, 2) maintenance of the symptoms, and 3) extinction of the symptoms.

Genesis: Levey (1955) asserted that: 1) it is necessary for one to be able to resist external controls if inner controls are to develop; 2) some children develop oppositional behavior in

response to acute emotional and painful situations, illnesses, and hospital confinement; and 3) oppositional behavior can also be biological in nature. Examples are toilet training, feeding, or the refusal to eat. Such symptoms often indicate a struggle for autonomy. For instance, in the second year of a child's life, there is usually a movement toward autonomy or self-determination. Behaviors that typically characterize this stage of development are persistency, stubbornnes, assertivenes, or refusal to comply.

This period of resistance is sometimes referred to as the first puberty and is considered normal in the course of development (before age two and in adolescence). It is when the child's oppositional behavior has not been substituted for a more mature interaction with his/her parents (after age three) that oppositional behavior is considered pathological.

Specific aspects of oppositional behavior have been investigated. Herbert (1978) studied temper tantrums and aggression. Tedeschi, Smith, and Brown (1970), as well as Patterson (1970), researched coercive power. Anthony and Gilpin (1976) were interested in the power struggle between parent and child as a result of an imbalance in the child of "yes" and "no" response behaviors. When the imbalance reaches a pathological level, there emerges a fierce power struggle between the child and his or her parents, teachers, and/or caretakers in both overt and covert forms.

Maintenance: The maintenance of oppositional behavior has been researched by Austad and Simmons (1978) and Rickard, Forehand, Wells, Griest, and McMahon (1981). Rickard et al. (1981) found that some oppositional children have parents who are depressed. Wahler (1980) worked with insular (isolated) mothers and found that they reported less oppositional behavior on the part of their children when they had positive interactions of their own with people outside

their homes.

Extinction: The extinction of oppositional behaviors was researched by several persons. O'dell (1974) found that when parents begin to reinforce those behaviors sought in the child and ignore or punish undesirable behaviors, the child's behavior is inclined to change in a positive direction. Patterson and Brodsky (1966), Forhand, King, Peed, and Yoder (1975), and Peed, Roberts, and Forehand (1977) all used parent-training programs intended to modify oppositional children's behavior. Zeilberger, Sampen, and Sloane (1968), Wahler (1969), and Scarboro and Forehand (1975) all observed that the use of "time-out" was an effective means of extinguishing oppositional behavior.

The present study sought to investigate the personality characteristics of oppositional children, using selected subscales of the Personality Inventory for Children (PIC) (Wirt, Seat, & Broen, 1977) to plot a personality profile of oppositional children. Twelve of the 16 subscales were selected for inclusion in the study. Selection criteria were based upon how closely the items that made up each scale reflected aspects of the oppositional child's personality or environment, as described in related literature.

A research design was developed that compared oppositonal children to non-oppositional children. Oppositional type was determined by an interview with the parent who filled out the PIC on behalf of their child. Profiles of the scored PICs were plotted and compared to an anticipated profile of oppositional children, using expected T score elevations. The data from this study were analyzed using multivariate and univariate statistics. The .05 level of significance was established as the critical probability level.

Method

Participants

Participants were the parents of 100 children. Forty three (43) were the parents of children identified as oppositional (25 males, mean age = 8.6 and 18 females, mean age = 8.4). Fifty seven (57) were the parents of children identified as displaying non-oppositional, compliant behaviors. Parents of both groups, whose children were between the ages of 6 and 12, were contacted through schools, churches, undergraduate classes, and a Junior Women's League. By limiting the upper range of ages (excluding children 13 to 16 years of age), control was established for the normal symptoms of noncompliant, oppositional behavior that commonly occurs at adolescence. Children ages 3, 4, and 5 were eliminated since " the scales are more stable for the six to sixteen age range" (Wirt, Lachar, Klinedinst, & Seat, 1977).

Procedure

Parents, who agreed to participate in the study, were given a 3 x 5 numbered identification card, signed an Informed Consent Form, and completed a 600 item PIC on behalf of their child by answering TRUE or FALSE for each of the items. To assure anonimity, the only information recorded on the answer sheet in addition to the respondents' answers was a parent identification number, the date of testing, the child's birthdate, age, race, sex, and grade in school, and one of two codes (described below).

The answer sheet was scored and the profile plotted on the Profile Form. The examiner then inspected the Profile Forms and identified profiles of children whom the examiner predicted would display oppositional behavior, based on the subscale elevations. Those profiles that appeared to reflect oppositional behavior were coded "1." Those profiles that did not appear to reflect

oppositional behavior were coded "2."

Parents were then interviewed by the examiner and screened for placement into one of the two groups. Placement within the experimental group (Group 1) was based upon information gained during the screening interview that was in accord with the diagnosis of Oppositional Disorder of Childhood and Adolescence according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association (1980). Parents of children chosen for the control group (Group 2) were those who described their children as non-oppositional, generally cooperative, and compliant.

A code identifying each child's behavior, as described by parents during the screening procedure, was written on the parent's identification card (3 = oppositional, 4 = non-oppositional). The PIC Profile Form codes and identification card codes were then compared and tallied. A Profile Form/identification card match was accepted when the examiner was able to predict oppositional behavior, based on a parent's account of their child's behavior compared with oppositional behavior as identified by that same parent's responses to the PIC Profile Form.

No contact was made with the children themselves. No further contact was made with individual parents after the test booklets and answer sheets were returned and screening interviews completed. However, a group debriefing session was held at a later date for parents interested in learning more about oppositional behavior of children. Recommendations were also made at that time regarding help available for such children and their parents.

Instruments

Personality Inventory for Children (PIC): The PIC is an "empirically and rationally constructed instrument which seeks to provide comprehensive and clinically relevant personality descriptions

of individuals primarily in the range from six to sixteen years of age" (Wirt, Lacher, Klinedinst, & Seat, 1977). The PIC is completed by the parent, usually the mother, on behalf of the child.

PIC Subscales:

Following is a listing of the PIC subscales that were used in this study, their enticipated T score elevations, and the criterion used as a basis for their inclusion.

F Scale (F): The F Scale was included due to its possible identification of a possible response set, such as deliberate or unintentional exaggeration of symptoms. A parent who is locked in a power struggle with their child might be identified on this scale (Anthony & Gilpin, 1976). [Moderately elevated, 60-70 T].

Defensive Scale: This scale meesures a parent's defensiveness regarding their child's behavior and seems to measure a tendency to be hostile, vigilant, and withholding of information (Wahler, 1980). [Moderately elevated, 60-70 T].

Adjustment Scale (ADJ): This scale meesures poor psychological adjustment (Petterson, 1975). [Elevated above 70 T].

Achievement Scale (ACH): This scale assists in the identification of children whose academic achievement is significantly below age expectation, though they may possess adequate intellectual capacity (Gilpin & Maltz, 1980). [Moderately elevated, 60-70 T].

Depression Scale (D): Symptoms of depression were included in Gilpin and Maltz's study (1980) and also in the Rickard et al. (1981) study. [Elevated above 70 T].

Family Relations Scale (FAM): The FAM scale meesures family effectiveness and cohesion, aspects lacking in families with oppositional children (Gilpin & Maltz, 1980; Tedeschi et al., 1970; Wahler, 1980). [Moderately elevated, 60-70 T].

Delinquency Scale (DLQ): This scale measures delinquent tendencies and includes items that indicate evidence of noncompliant behavior. [Elevated above 70 T].

Withdrawal Scale (WDL): This scale describes children who tend to want to be alone (Patterson et al., 1967). [Moderately elevated, 60-70 T].

Anxiety Scale (ANX): This scale helps identify some common symptoms of anxiety (e.g., brooding, moodiness, fearfulness, poor self-concept, sensitivity to criticism) that would help explain an oppositional child's noncompliance. [Elevated above 70 T).

Psychosis Scale (PSY): The PSY Scale was included since it includes enough items that describe an oppositional child's social isolation and temper tantrums to elevate that scale to a possible significant level. Items from this scale, believed to be critical items in describing psychotic behavior, were screened separately. Psychotic children were eliminated from the study. [Elevated above 70 T].

Hyperactive Scale (HPR): The HPR Scale was included, as this would be a secondary diagnosis and is often associated with oppositional behavior. [Elevated above 70 T].

Social Skills Scale (SSK): This scale measures various aspects of the ability to lead and to follow as well as aspects of cooperation. These abilities will be recognized as antonyms of "oppositional" and "noncompliant." [Elevated above 70 T].

Analysis of Data

The design of the study was a 2 x 2 fixed effects, fully-crossed design. Sex of the children was controlled statistically by including it as a factor in the analysis. Control for age was accomplished by limiting participation to parents of children ages 6 through 12.

Since the hypothesis of the experiment was concerned with the difference between the means

of two groups on each of the subscales of the PIC subscales, chosen for inclusion in the study, a 2 x 2 (sex x behavior), multivariate analysis of variance was utilized in which both the multivariate and univariate statistics were reported. Descriptive statistics were in the form of means, standard deviations, and within-group correlations.

Although the belief was that a profile would emerge in the direction of elevations on 12 of the subscales, a two-tailed test was used so that significant differences in an opposite direction would not be missed. A secondary concern of this study was the establishment of a hit rate for the purpose of predicting oppositional profiles. A general elevation was expected to appear on PIC profiles of oppositional children on subscales anticipated as being part of the Oppositional Profile. An alpha level of $p < .05$ was used for all tests. The computer program used to analyze the data was the Univariate and multivariate analysis of variance, covariance, and regression, program version 6.1 designed by Jeremy D. Finn (1980). The independent variables were sex and behavior. The dependent variables were the 12 PIC subscales included in the study.

The hit rate for successful prediction of oppositional behavior, based on an Oppositional Profile that emerged for oppositional children, was determined by arriving at percentages for four groups: 1) the percentage of those whom the examiner predicted would be oppositional and were found to be oppositional; 2) the percentage of those whom the examiner predicted would not be oppositional and were found to be oppositional; 3) the percentage of those whom the examiner predicted would be oppositional and were not found to be oppositional; and 4) the percentage of those whom the examiner predicted would not be oppositional and were not found to be oppositional. The greatest interest was directed to the first category: the percentage of profiles that were predicted to be from oppositional children, based on an analysis of the subscale elevations, that

were actually obtained by children who were oppositional, as determined by the diagnostic interview using the criteria from the DSM III.

Results

Preliminary to testing the hypothesis, it was necessary to test the interaction source of variability. See Table 1. The F value for the multivariate test of the sex by oppositional/non-oppositional interaction was .4848 (df = 12, 85; p = .9185). It was concluded

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Table 1 about here

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that no sex by oppositional type interaction existed. Therefore, the main effect for oppositional type was directly testable.

Having first controlled for subjects' sex, the F value for the multivariate test of oppositional type was F = 5.71 (df = 12, 85; p = .0001). The null hypothesis was rejected at the .05 level of significance. It was concluded that the two groups had different vectors of means. When simultaneously considering the 12 outcome measures, oppositional children differed significantly from non-oppositional children. All 12 measures were found to contribute to the explanation of the multivariate difference. Reported in Table 2 are the observed combined mean scores over levels of sex for the two oppositional types, used to interpret the oppositional type differences. Oppositional subjects scored higher than non-oppositional subjects on the following PIC subscales:

Insert Table 2 about here

F, ADJ (34.3, 23.8), ACH, D, FAM, DLQ, WDL (4.4, 3.4), ANX, PSY, HPR, and SSK. The oppositional subjects' mean score was lower than the non-oppositional subjects' mean score for the variable DEF (9.4 and 10.6 respectively).

Separate score profiles for boys and girls were constructed, using the two oppositional type sets of means, thus creating two (boys vs. girls) Personality Profiles of Oppositional Children, using subscales of the PIC (see table 3). The possible influence of fewer female subjects on

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Insert Table 3 about here

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the results must be taken into consideration when comparing the profiles. The profiles are very similar for boys and girls.

Profiles were inspected in order to arrive at the number of times the prediction of oppositionalism was correct. Based upon the anticipated T score elevations of the subscales, none of the profiles were identified as belonging to oppositional children because anticipated T score elevations, used as cut off scores, were too high. Since the anticipated T score elevations were too high, a hit rate was not possible using that method. However, a hit rate was possible to obtain when the Oppositional Boys' and Girls' Profiles were used as a basis for comparison.

Discussion/Conclusions

Oppositional children were found to differ significantly from non-oppositional children on all 12 of the PIC Subscales selected for inclusion in this study. Eleven of the 12 subscales were significantly higher for oppositional children than for non-oppositional children. However, the DEF (defensiveness) scale was significantly lower for oppositional children. This would seem to

imply that the PIC can be used to distinguish between these two groups. When a combined boys'/girls' profile that emerged from the study was used to predict oppositionalism, an acceptable hit level was achieved. Fifty-six (98%) of the non-oppositional children's profiles and 22 (51%) of the oppositional children's profiles were accurately predicted for a total hit rate of 78%. No sex differences were found to exist between oppositional and non-oppositional children.

A general description of the personality characteristics of oppositional children may be drawn. Oppositional children appear to be psychologically maladjusted (ADJ), may have problems in school achievement (ACH), may be depressed (D), and may tend to come from ineffective families that lack cohesion (FAM). These children may display delinquent tendencies (DLQ) and may be somewhat withdrawn (WDL). Oppositional children appear to be anxious (ANX), and to display some features that would be similar to children with psychosis (PSY). Oppositional children are often overactive (HPR) unless severely depressed. These children may also be lacking in social skills (SSK) and, therefore, may not reflect effective social relations in childhood.

Also, the severity of the behavioral problem may be indicated by a slight response set in the responses (F scale) of the parent. Parents of oppositional children do not appear to be defensive about their children's oppositonal behavior (DEF scale). This could be interpreted as a need for these parents to seek help in finding answers to their questions regarding how to rear these children. Interviews with parents of oppositional children tended to last much longer than interviews with parents of children in the non-oppositional group, indicating that the parents of oppositional children were appropriately open and candid about their children's behavior.

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Table 1

Univariate and Multivariate Analyses of Variance Source Table of the 12 Dependent and Independent Variables (Sex and Oppositional Type)

		Multivariate				Univariate		
Source	Variable	Mean Square	F-Ratio	(df, df_2)	p<	df	F-ratio	p<
SEX			1.34	(,12,85)	.2098			
	F	3.61				1	.86	.3549
	DEF	16.00				1	7.12	.0090
	ADJ	222.01				1	5.01	.0276
	ACH	32.50				1	1.94	.1671
	D	1.96				1	.06	.8102
	FAM	12.96				1	.45	.5020
	DLQ	67.24				1	.42	.0381
	WDL	.64				1	.12	.7350
	ANX	4.00				1	.23	.6320
	PSY	16.81				1	1.79	.1844
	HPR	37.21				1	3.79	.0545
	SSK	9.00				1	.35	.5563
OPPOSITIONAL TYPE/SEX			5.71	(12,85)	.0001			
	F	45.173				1	10.81	.0015
	DEF	29.546				1	13.16	.0005
	ADJ	2506.717				1	56.54	.0001
	ACH	125.571				1	7.49	.0074
	D	969.728				1	28.72	.0001
	FAM	303.771				1	10.65	.0016
	DLQ	553.075				1	36.39	.0001
	WDL	24.908				1	4.49	.0368
	ANX	179.595				1	10.37	.0018
	PSY	105.165				1	11.19	.0012
	HPR	173.952				1	17.73	.0001
	SSK	635.187				1	24.60	.0001

Table 1 (Continues)

Table 1 (Continued)

		Multivariate				Univariate		
Source	Variable	Mean Square	F-Ratio	(df, df_2)	p<	df	F-ratio	p<
OPPOSITIONAL/TYPE X SEX INTERACTION			.4848	(12,85)	.9185			
	F	.021				1	.01	.9432
	DEF	.216				1	.10	.7575
	ADJ	23.243				1	.52	.4708
	ACH	.336				1	.02	.8877
	D	20.466				1	.61	.4382
	FAM	16.523				1	.58	.4486
	DLQ	18.456				1	1.21	.2733
	WDL	5.555				1	1.00	.3197
	ANX	5.650				1	.33	.5693
	PSY	11.615				1	1.24	.2592
	HPR	0.068				1	.01	.9339
	SSK	15.760				1	.61	.4366
ERROR:	Variable	Variance (Error Mean Square)						
	F	4.177						
	DEF	2.246						
	ADJ	44.335						
	ACH	16.760						
	D	33.770						
	FAM	28.532						
	DLQ	15.200						
	WDL	5.551						
	ANX	17.327						
	PSY	9.402						
	HPR	9.813						
	SSK	25.818						

Note: Type/Sex symbolizes the test for type is conditional on having first controlled for the sex variable.

Table 2

Observed Combined Means, Over Levels of Sex, for the Two Oppositional Types

		Variables											
SEX	N	F	DEF	ADJ	ACH	D	FAM	DLQ	WDL	ANX	PSY	HPR	SSK
All Males	50	3.3	9.7	29.8	11.2	9.9	6.8	14.8	3.9	8.6	4.5	17.2	11.0
All Females	50	2.9	10.5	26.8	10.1	9.7	6.1	13.2	3.8	8.2	3.7	16.0	10.4
All Oppositional	43	3.9	9.4	34.3	12.0	13.4	8.5	16.8	4.4	10.0	5.3	18.2	13.6
All Non-Oppositional	57	2.5	10.6	23.8	9.6	7.1	4.9	11.9	3.4	7.3	3.2	15.4	8.5